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ART AMONG THE BALLAD-MONGERS.

BY LLEWELLYNN JEWITT, F.S.A.



AMONG the various "out-of-the-way corners of Art" to which, from time to time, I have devoted, and still trust to devote, brief occasional chapters in the *Art Journal*, few present such a diversity of style and cover such a wide range of subjects, or are possessed of so much real interest, as that I have now chosen for a few pages of illustration. The ballads of the "good old times"—those ballads of the people which Macaulay declared to be the groundwork of history—often rich in humour, and almost invariably full of historical allusions and of information on manners and customs, habits and sentiments, costume, trades and occupations, traditions, beliefs, and superstitions, are not half sufficiently understood, nor are their importance and value appreciated to the extent they deserve to be. Whether in the versification itself or in the curious woodcuts with which they are adorned, the ballads of past times bring perhaps more vividly before us than does any other class of literature the habits of those times, and give us innumerable "missing links" that help to connect together the otherwise broken chains of history and of antiquarian research. However coarse and uncouth the modes of expression may be—and that in some ballads the expressions are, to our modern notions, coarse and indelicate in the extreme, is certain—or however rudely executed

may be the woodcuts with which they are accompanied, something good and something useful may be learned from each; and the patient and intelligent student who refers to them for information cannot rise from their examination without having gained something which he will be able to turn to good account in after days, in whatever course of study he may be engaged.

Ballads are, indeed, a rich storehouse of knowledge, to which all with properly directed minds may resort for information and for instruction at all times, and on a multiplicity of subjects. They form not only the groundwork of history, but serve as illustrations and "proofs" of history, and help to clear up and unravel many obscure points and knotty questions.

Some of the earliest known printed ballads are preserved among the valuable collection of broadsides in the library of the Society of Antiquaries, and others of early date are included in the famous Roxburghe and Pepys collections, and in other public and private collections. The earlier ballads are, as a matter of course, printed in "black letter;" and this kind of type continued in use for them—or rather for some of them—until about the year 1700. "When ballads," says Mr. Chappell, "were intended for the exclusive use of the ordinary ballad buyers, they were printed in 'black letter,' a thick kind of Old English type that was retained for that especial purpose for a



Fig. 1.

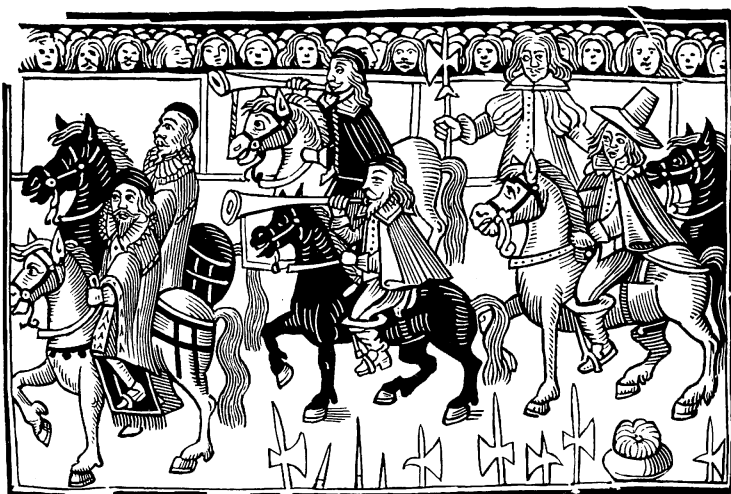


Fig. 2.

century and a half after it had fallen into desuetude, and nearly a century of disuse, for books. According to Pepys, who was a contemporary authority, the use of black letter ceased about the year 1700. On the title-page of his volumes he describes them as *My Collection of Ballads, Begun by Mr. Selden, Improved by ye addition of many Pieces elder thereto in Time, and the whole continued down to the year 1700, When the Form, till then peculiar thereto, vizt. of the Black Letter, with Picturs, seems (for cheapness sake) wholly laid aside, for that of the White Letter without Pictures.* "White letter" printing of non-political street ballads may be said broadly to have commenced about 1685, and of political ballads about half a century earlier."

The collection of ballads known as the "Roxburghe" was originally formed by Robert Harley (eldest son of Sir Robert Harley), created in 1711 Baron Harley of Wigmore, Earl of Oxford, and Earl Mortimer, to whom also is due the lasting honour of forming the priceless and matchless "Harleian Collection of Manuscripts," now among the greatest treasures of

the British Museum. At the dispersion by sale of the Earl of Oxford's printed books, his ballads were bought by James West, President of the Royal Society, at whose death they were again sold (March, 1773), and became the property of Major Thomas Pearson for, it is said, twenty pounds. The lot was entered in the sale catalogue as *A curious collection of Old Ballads, in number above 1,200, b[lack] l[etter], with curious frontispieces. 3 Vols.* By Major Pearson the collection was rearranged and bound, more than a century ago, in two volumes, with the addition of several ballads, and also with printed indexes and title pages. At his death, in 1788, the collection was again sold. This time the "numerous and matchless collection of old ballads are all printed in the black letter, and decorated with many hundred wooden prints; they are pasted upon paper with borders, printed on purpose, round each ballad, also a printed title and index to each volume;" being bought by the Duke of Roxburghe for twenty-six pounds fourteen shillings and sixpence. To this collection the duke added some fresh ballads, and also a third volume of later effusions, including "many

white-letter ballads, chiefly of the last century, and, in some cases, so late in the century as to number within it a song by Burns." The collection, however, was sufficiently enlarged by the duke to take his name, and has ever since been known as the "Roxburghe Ballads." At the duke's death the three volumes of ballads were, in 1813, sold to the Shaksperian scholar, Mr. Benjamin Heywood Bright, second son of Richard Bright, of Ham Green, Bristol, and of Colwall, in Herefordshire, for four hundred and forty-seven pounds fifteen shillings; about four hundred and twenty-one pounds more than the duke had given for them. Mr. Bright, who added a fourth volume of eighty-five pages of black-letter ballads to the collection, died in 1843, and at the sale of his library the three Roxburghe

by casting up a stone. More solid things do not show the complexion of the time so well as ballads and libels." The Roxburghe collection, numbering about one thousand four hundred and sixty-six bal-

lads, of which ten, at all events, were printed before 1584, tell pretty well, both in political and social matters, "which way the wind blew" in the days wherein they were written and sung.

The Pepys collection of ballads was, as just stated on the authority of quaint old Samuel Pepys himself, commenced by the learned John Selden (whose father, be it remembered, was a musician or "minstrel," as he is described in the parish register of his own parish), who

died in 1654, in his seventieth year, and continued and much enlarged as well as enriched by other ballads "elder thereto



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.

volumes were bought for the British Museum for five hundred and thirty-five pounds, and his own additional volume for twenty-five pounds five shillings. The "Roxburghe Ballads," of whose history these brief particulars will doubtless be of interest, now form one of the choicest and best guarded of literary treasures in the Museum library. "It is," says Mr. Chappell, "by miscellaneous collections of this kind only that the true state and character of the age, political and otherwise, can be estimated, with all its struggling elements at work." As Selden said, "Though some make slight of libels, yet you may see by them how the wind sets; as, take a straw and throw it up into the air, you shall see by that which way the wind is; which you shall not do

in point of time," by the diarist himself. The collection of ballads "in the Black Letter with Picturs" was continued by

Pepys till close upon the date of his death, 1703, when, by will, dated in May in that year, he gave the use of his valuable library and collection of prints to his nephew, John Jackson (second son of his sister Paulina) for life, and then to go to Magdalen College, Cambridge, there to be placed, subject to certain restrictions and regulations, in the sole custody of the master of that college for the time being. There the Pepys collection of ballads still very properly remains; but improperly, or unwisely, they remain

almost a sealed book to the lover of ballad lore. The Ballad Society, which is doing a valuable service by printing the



Fig. 6.

Roxburghe and other collections, desired to turn their first attention to the Pepysian treasures, and application to that end was some years back made to the college authorities. "The answer received was to the effect that the master and fellows of Magdalene had for some time had the intention of some day printing the collection themselves—were indeed then indexing it; that in no case would the college print the collection entire, but that they might soon issue a part of it under the charge of one of their Fellows." Thus these treasures still remain hidden, and are likely to be so. Their publication is a matter which men of letters have earnestly desired for a century, and it is to be regretted that so rich a mine of literary and artistic treasures remains so long locked up from those who would make valuable use of them in elucidating history. The collection is composed of five volumes, and contains about eighteen hundred ballads, of which nearly fourteen hundred are in black letter; and the Pepys collection, in addition, contains a hundred and twelve *Penny Merriments* and *Garlands* of ballads, arranged in three other volumes. Other collections of ballads, of more or less note, are in the Bodleian Library, the British Museum, the Chetham Library, and many other public and private libraries. The immense variety of the ballads, and their astonishing number, show their extreme popularity; that popularity being incontrovertible evidence of the estimation in which

they were held, and of the hold they had on the public mind and taste. It also proves their value at the present day to the student, who would unlock their allusions to the sentiments and the feelings, the manners and the habits, the political and social relations, and the trades and occupations of the people, and would turn them to good historical account.

Singing was in former days one of the necessities, not a mere accomplishment, of English social life. Every one sang, and ballad-singing was the order of the day, ay, and also of the night, among people of every class, and dancing was its common accompaniment. "*Ball, ballet, and ballad*," writes Mr. Chappell, "are kindred words, derived from the same Greek root (*βαλλίζειν*), and when the English people danced they strengthened the music by their song. It was not mere natural singing—all were taught to sing, rich and poor. The education of the poor was reading, writing, grammar, and music; and in the early part of Queen Elizabeth's reign these four qualifications of the children educated in Bridewell were advertised as recommendations

for their being taken as servants, as apprentices, and for husbandry. There *must* have been some solidity in the musical education of the lower classes when the watermen of London could compose Rounds or Canons in unison, as in 'Row the boat, Norman,' written in 1543," and others. "When the extreme Puritans—not of the Cromwell stamp, but sour-faced men, who



Fig. 7.



Fig. 8.



Fig. 9.



Fig. 10.

deemed cheerfulness a sin and a dance round a maypole to be a sure pathway to the lower regions—when these men gained the upper hand in the state they put down 'Merry England,' and their zeal gave so great a check to the amusements of the people, and especially to the culture of music, that *Old England* has not even yet recovered herself. The mind requires relief; these men sought refuge in violent political and religious zeal.

Cobblers became teachers, the strangest new sects were started, and Old Bethlehem ('Bedlam') became a necessity." The natural sequence of the want of amusement was a progressive increase of drunkenness among the people, and with it the attendant immoralities and sometimes crimes.

It was this general habit of and love for singing that caused the enormous demand for ballads in England, and there is

hardly a dramatist of the sixteenth or the seventeenth century that does not allude to their powerful influence. Thus Shakespeare, in *Henry IV.*: "An I have not ballads made on you all and sung to filthy tunes, let a cup of sack be my poison." And again: "I beseech your grace let it be booked with the rest of this day's deeds, or by the lord I will have it in a particular ballad, with mine own picture at the top of it, Colville kissing my foot."

And this allusion to the "picture at the top" of the ballad appropriately brings me to the close of this chapter. My object being not so much with the ballads themselves as with the "pictures," the "blocks," or the "cuts," which accompany them. Ballads were often stinging lampoons, and the threat of being "balladed" was one not to be lightly thought of, and when accompanied by the other threat of being "pictured" was

enough to make a proud man wince. Thus, as grand old Philip Massinger made Chamont threaten Laura—

"I will have thee
Pictured as thou now art, and thy whole story
Sung to some villanous tune in a lewd ballad,
And make thee so notorious in the world
That boys in the streets shall hoot at thee"—

ballads became deterrents from evil, and people shrank from being made notorious at the mouth of the balladmonger.

"O why was England *merrie* called, I pray you tell me why?
Because Old England merry was in merry times gone by."

To the facsimiles of curious woodcuts introduced in these pages, and to others that will follow, I shall make due reference in my succeeding chapters.

(To be continued.)

JAPANESE ART.

By SIR RUTHERFORD ALCOCK, K.C.B., D.C.L.



IN the series of articles which has recently appeared in this Journal on Japanese Art frequent reference will be found to one element, underlying all Japanese work as a governing principle—*variety*. That love of variety and novelty which is common to the human race has been cultivated and developed among this people until it has become almost a passion, giving shape and character to all their Art. Of the thousands of cheap fans now scattered over Europe, I doubt whether any two would be found exactly alike. In this distinguishing feature of their work the artists of Japan have gone to Nature for their inspiration; and as it is mainly to these two sources, their love of Nature and their love of variety, that Japanese Art owes much of its excellence, as well as its charm and originality, the object they proposed to themselves and the means they have taken to attain it seem worthy of further study and a separate chapter.

I think it will be seen that the true secret of their unrivalled success in those branches of Art to which they have devoted themselves is to be found in their loving and patient study of all the *processes* in Nature—in other words, the methods by which, in the realms of Nature, the *greatest variety* is secured, and the nature of those lines and combinations which, as Hogarth observed, seem to raise in the mind the ideas of all the variety of forms imaginable. By a natural instinct or intuitive love for that variety which is only seen in its greatest perfection in Nature, and underlies all excellence in Art by the share it has in producing beauty, the Japanese have gone to the ornamental part of Nature's great treasure-house—to the forms and colours of plants, flowers, leaves, the painting of butterflies' wings, the skins of animals, the plumage of birds, and markings of shells, in a word, to all that constitutes the glory and the beauty of the visible world, and ministers with never-failing and lavish bounty to the sense of beauty, of harmony, and grace. Hogarth was right in asserting that the principles are in Nature by which we are guided in determining what is truly beautiful or graceful and excellent in Art. They went, therefore, to the fountain-head in going to Nature and there reverently watching and studying at her feet all the processes by which such infinite variety and beauty were unfailingly evolved. It followed naturally that in this admiration of Nature's works, in which beauty and variety are the leading and characteristic features, they would imbibe a corresponding aversion to sameness and a too great uniformity or regularity, which they nowhere found in Nature. An exact repetition of equal parts without variation—or equal division of lines and spaces—becomes to them something utterly distasteful, as a violation of the principles and order of Nature. To avoid any such appearance, even when the symmetry and orderly plan on which plants and

flowers are constructed and the object of utility and adaptation to a purpose enforced regularity, they followed the subtle devices and secret processes they observed in Nature, by which the regularity of skeleton or ground plan is effectually concealed.

To these matters I referred generally in the first article of the series,* as giving a key to the artistic excellence of the Japanese. But the subject is well worthy of more minute study and a greater elaboration, in order to show what those processes in Nature are from which the Japanese have derived their cunning in every kind of Art-industry, and how naturally the observation of the one has led to the other. The prevalence of order, method, and design in the constructive processes giving form to the various products of the vegetable kingdom, could not long have escaped such close observers. What they first noticed and admired was, no doubt, the endless variety and constant beauty of Nature's works, and the absence of formality and all appearance of regularity or monotony. Yet, behind this apparent freedom and wantonness of growth, they would in time discover that a rigid adherence to an orderly plan of a geometric character or pattern was one of the conditions of this infinite variety of beautiful forms. Whether they attained to a knowledge that geometrical and arithmetic proportions govern the material universe, and are to be traced as clearly in the graceful flower or stately tree as in the crystallization of minerals or the orbits of the stars, may be very doubtful. Nor was it needful for their purpose. It was enough for them to discover the existence of a general plan and a fixed order of development amidst all the variety they admired, and to discern how the two could be combined. This must soon have led them to perceive that, although Nature builds up plants and animals each upon a regular plan, she takes infinite pains to disguise such regularity under an appearance of freedom, and has many devices for concealing from the eye the skeleton, with all its rigidity of mathematical and geometrical proportions. When they had advanced thus far they had an endless field before them, rich in every kind of suggestive motives for the perfection of the decorative art; and they have profited by such teaching.

An orderly plan of geometric proportions and definite pattern as a basis, the constant repetition of similar parts in a fixed order of succession and alternation, being given to them as the chief elements of all Nature's exhaustless beauty and variety, the Japanese artist has so well profited by his lessons that, although variety has become the distinguishing character of his work, he never fails in symmetry, though his idea of what constitutes symmetry and the best mode of securing it is widely different from any that has prevailed as a general rule in the Western world.

* See *Art Journal* for 1875, p. 101.